

**TOWN OF ROCKY HILL
TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET WORKSHOP OF MAY 6, 2014**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Henry Vassel called the May 6, 2014 Budget Workshop to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Rocky Hill Town Hall, 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Those in attendance: Deputy Mayor Nadine Bell, Councilor Meg Casasanta, Councilor Guy Drapeau, Councilor Joe Kochanek, Councilor Bill MacDonald, Councilor Tim Moriarty, Councilor Frank Szeps and Councilor Cathy Vargas. Also present were Town Manager Barbara Gilbert and Finance Director John Mehr.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor Vassel asked for a Moment of Silence to be observed.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Vassel asked if anyone from the public wished to speak. He told them if they did, for them to come to the podium and for them to give their name and address for the record. Joseph Leal, 19 Textbook Avenue, R.H., said he hoped that this would be a positive workshop this evening and he was hoping that they weren't going to try to "reinvent the wheel" when it comes to their schools. They have worked really hard to get to this point and the schools need every penny that they can get. He told the Town Council to please keep the children in mind and for them not to work backwards on this. He also told the Town Council to do this right.

Mayor Vassel said thank you. He asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak from the public. Theresa Weatherbee, 15 Stockton Lane, R.H., said that she just had "gotten wind" that this evening's meeting was going to be about all-day kindergarten. She is very passionate about this. She has three children and the oldest one is looking to go to kindergarten this coming school year. She mentioned that she is feeling like this is "a slap in the face" if this is going backwards and that the Town Council is "taking candy away from kids". They got all excited that there was going to be all-day kindergarten. She said that people voted based on the fact that they (Councilors) ran on a platform with regards to trying to get all-day kindergarten implemented. Her name is in a lottery for the magnet school. She would like her children to go to schools in Rocky Hill but she said that if she got into the magnet school that she would take that in a heartbeat. She told the Town Council that they aren't leaving her a choice because she doesn't know where this is going. She also told the Town Council that they should all take all-

day kindergarten into consideration because she said it seems like Rocky Hill is the only Town of the Towns around them that doesn't have all-day kindergarten. She questioned what the \$10,000+ in taxes that she pays is getting her. She mentioned garbage pickup, etc. and she said that she would pay for that because she would rather have her children have an education. She mentioned that they tried an all-day kindergarten this year and she asked where this is leaving the children who did half of a day for kindergarten because they are already half behind the other ones. She is truly hoping that this isn't going backwards and she is hoping that she didn't vote a regime in that is going to take back what they were really on because that is what she had based her vote on. She told the Town Council that she really hopes they take all-day kindergarten into consideration and that they work with all of them. They all got very excited that this was going to happen but if they are taking this away now then it would be very disheartening. She begged them. She mentioned again that her oldest child is getting ready to go to kindergarten and she has two more that will be following. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Tami Devine Fagan, 411 Old Main Street, R.H., said she wanted to reiterate what Theresa Weatherbee had said with regards to the importance of all-day kindergarten. Tami Devine Fagan said she had just heard that there might be a possibility of that being postponed or that there might be some other adjustments to it. She said that she wanted to come this evening to make her feelings clear and she thought that she was speaking on behalf of many other parents of this Town. She mentioned that she is a former high school teacher in the English Department at Rocky Hill High School and she had taught for ten years in this Town. She said that her husband is a physics teacher in Rocky Hill. She has two children who were present with her this evening and her daughter had lost in the lottery last year. She and her husband sent their daughter to Corpus Christi in Wethersfield because they value the all-day kindergarten experience. She is a college professor in education now and all of the research she has read is pointing to the value of all-day kindergarten. At last check, 17% of Connecticut has half day kindergarten. Rocky Hill is in that 17% and she thinks that is really unacceptable for a Town like Rocky Hill. This is especially because all of their neighboring Towns have all-day kindergarten. She and her husband also believe that a public school education is the best education. She is a lifetime educator and she knows the value of a public education. She is a product of one and she is hoping that her children will be the product of one too. She explained that they have to make choices that are best for their children. She said that it was upsetting and it really "hit home" when her daughter had lost the lottery last year because many of her friends, who had young children, had won the lottery. Those children were friends of her daughter and they got the opportunity to go to West Hill School or Stevens School but her daughter had to leave the boundaries of Rocky Hill in order to get the same experiences. She said this is despite the fact that they (she and her husband) are paying the same taxes. She explained that this really "hit home" because of her family being one of educators who have experience in Rocky Hill. She has great respect for the Town Council, for the Board of Education, for all of the teachers and for all of the educators in Rocky Hill. She knows that this really comes down to the budget because she knows that everyone's heart is in the right place but she thinks that they have to invest in their children's future before anything else. She said also that it is an injustice to deprive students of the best possible education, especially in a Town like Rocky Hill. She thinks the lottery was a good first step but she doesn't think that they can continue with this kind of an inequality and a disparity in education for the students. They need to do their best in order to provide their students with the best possible education that they can. She is hoping that her son,

who is coming up into the age of kindergarten, will be able to stay in Rocky Hill because they love it and they have chosen it in large part because of the quality of the schools. She thanked the Town Council for listening to her and she told them that she hopes they consider those facts. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Mayor Vassel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak. Matt Heimline, 2599 Main Street, R.H., said he is a professor at Central Connecticut State University. He left Redding, Pennsylvania to move here. Redding, Pennsylvania has recently been voted as having the greatest poverty level in the Country so he wanted to move somewhere that is safer and that has better schools, etc. He chose to move to Rocky Hill for many reasons (i.e. nice neighbors, access to highways and great playgrounds, etc.). He said another reason was because of the schools in this Town. He told the Town Council that when he is considering the possibility that they might be changing the all-day kindergarten and that they are also looking at cuts to education that he is wondering about if this is dollars over children. He told them that he knows there are always fiscal decisions that have to be made. He has to decide when he is looking at these decisions as to whether he will be buying in Rocky Hill or not because he is renting right now. He mentioned that they (he and his family) might not stay in this Town when he is looking at these types of decisions and thinking about how this might turn out. This is despite the fact that his son is in third grade and they have a daughter who will be registering for all-day kindergarten because they would like her to be in that so that they can continue to stay in Rocky Hill. He thanked the Town Council for their time. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Devon Coyle Francis, 293 Pheasant Drive, R.H., said she has been a lifelong resident of Rocky Hill. She is the mother of a two year old child and a five year old child. Her five year old child will be entering kindergarten in the fall. She thinks that everything that everyone has said, up until this point this evening, has been “spot on”. She thought throughout Rocky Hill that everyone had breathed a sigh of relief when all-day kindergarten had been approved. She said it is kind of like “kicking the can down the road” now that this decision is potentially being postponed. There are approximately one hundred and fifty students who would reap the benefits of all-day kindergarten this year or she said there would potentially be one hundred and fifty students who would be starting off on “the wrong foot” with kindergarten for just half of a day. She thinks another thing that has to be considered is that parents have stopped looking for other potential solutions when all-day kindergarten had been passed. She had pulled her application out of the magnet school right away and she didn’t bother looking into private schools because she thought she could send her daughter to Stevens School, just like she had gone to, as well as her husband. She explained that she has closed the other potential avenues but they might be back at “square one” and she doesn’t have another potential solution. She said that she didn’t need to go into the benefits of all-day kindergarten because everybody had already talked about those. She referred to what Matt Heimline had said about them thinking about the cost savings this year. Devon Coyle Francis said this is going to certainly be very costly but she said the parents of the children won’t necessarily invest in Rocky Hill if they don’t invest in their future and in their children. People will be moving out and she said there will be people, like Tami Devine Fagan, who is sending her child to a school in Wethersfield. Devon Coyle Francis said she is sure that after Tami Devine Fagan picks her child up that they go to a restaurant or the parks in Wethersfield. The Town will benefit if they keep the students within the Town’s boundaries. She also mentioned how Rocky Hill is in DRG (District Reference Group) “D” and

they are in the bottom quartile of this group with regards to offering all-day kindergarten. Rocky Hill is in the 24% of that group that doesn't offer all-day kindergarten. The DRG below the one that Rocky Hill is in is for inferior Towns to Rocky Hill theoretically and only one out of those twenty-two school districts doesn't offer all-day kindergarten so they have a 95% rate of offering it for all of the students. This isn't just a lottery system that Rocky Hill currently has. She thinks it is paramount that Rocky Hill sticks with the plan of implementing all-day kindergarten across the board if they want to keep this Town a thriving one, as well as continue to draw people in. She thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Mayor Vassel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Frank Servidone, 99 Countryside Drive, R.H., said he has a three year old child and a five year old one. His five year old child is enrolled for all-day kindergarten. He said there really wasn't that much that he could add to what the parents had said who had already come to the podium this evening so he said that he just wanted to clarify a few things. He mentioned that it is their responsibility to educate their children so he told them that this is something they should keep in their minds. He told them to be evenhanded and fair with this so that every child has a chance to go into all-day kindergarten. He also told them that this should be a priority and he knows that they have many of these responsibilities but one of their community's responsibilities is to raise the children, as well as to educate them. A lot of the other Towns around Rocky Hill are able to do this so it really isn't a magical thing and he said that maybe they are putting this at a different priority level than Rocky Hill does. He thinks that the Town Council and the parents of Rocky Hill feel that this should be a priority though. He also thinks the lottery would be unacceptable because this is kind of saying that someone is lucky but someone else isn't. The other people have extra out-of-pocket expenses in many cases and they are left stranded. He told the Town Council that he hopes they will take all of these things into consideration and that they make a good decision. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Mayor Vassel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Michelle Walsh, 24 Farms Village Road, R.H., said her son is in Stevens School and they were part of the lottery this year so he is in all-day kindergarten. She mentioned that when she had seen the e-mail today that she thought it was really important for her to come out just to say how important it is for them to have the all-day kindergarten for next year. She had to send her daughter to Kindercare because she hadn't been fortunate to have the all-day program. Her daughter hated going to Kindercare but she said her son loves the all-day kindergarten program. Her son is able to participate in the specials but her daughter wasn't able to do that. Her son is also able to develop his friendships and she explained some more. She mentioned about the families who might not be able to afford sending their children somewhere else and she questioned what children can learn by going to kindergarten for two and a half hours. Most children are getting more time now in preschool than they are in kindergarten. She was thrilled to get all-day kindergarten for her son but she felt bad for the parents who weren't picked in that lottery. She asked how those children will stack up with the children who did get the all-day kindergarten and she asked how much further behind those children are going to be down the road. She reiterated what everyone else had said this evening about how it is really important to have this pushed to the top of the budget. The children are their future and they come first. She thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vassel said thank you.

Aimee Falcigno, 9 Rocamora Road, R.H., said she was going along with all of the other parents who were present this evening. She has a five year old child and an eight year old one. Her son, who was born in September, would be entering into what she thought would be an all-day kindergarten this year. He did an all-day kindergarten at Kindercare this year. She said they (her family) were very thrilled to hear that there would be all-day kindergarten in Rocky Hill next year but they are hearing now something that is a little different. She mentioned that she is a working Mom and she said a lot of them are. The places they have as alternatives need to have a lot of notice so she is concerned about what she will do with her child next year if Rocky Hill's kindergarten isn't an all-day one. She said that she might send her child to a magnet school or to Corpus Christi. She is very much for the modular classrooms and for the all-day kindergarten. She told the Town Council that she just wanted them to know this and she thanked them very much. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

John Bedlack, 7 Murphy Drive, R.H., said he had received an e-mail today at approximately 2:30 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. that was asking parents to come out this evening to this budget workshop. He said it is a real shame that a lot of the parents in Council Chambers this evening were feeling that there is a possibility of there not being all-day kindergarten. He mentioned how there used to be a news program that was on approximately twenty years ago and at the end of the program, part of it was "the rest of the story". He said that he wanted to give "the rest of the story" to the parents in Council Chambers this evening. He mentioned that all-day kindergarten was not only promised by Mayor Vasel, as well as the majority of that Party, but the Board of Education had passed this unanimously also. John Bedlack told the Town Council that he wasn't sure what the parents needed to do to convince them that Rocky Hill needs all-day kindergarten. He told the Town Council that they have a tough job to do with regards to the "rest of the story" and they have some financial decisions to make. He referred to how he had said yesterday that this can be done without having to spend the proposed money because there are options, which he truly believes that the Town Council knows about. He told the Town Council that all-day kindergarten can be provided to people in the Council Chambers without them having to spend as much money as is in the budget. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Jeff Thomen, 8 Knoll Lane, R.H., said he was hoping to offer some new perspective to some of the support that was offered for all-day kindergarten. His wife was also standing next to him at the podium. He said that he has one son who will be in first grade this coming school year. His son was fortunate to have been picked in the lottery this past year and he was fortunate to have gotten chosen for all-day kindergarten, of which he is enrolled in. He has seen how this has changed his son's maturity and his development. He has seen how his son has interacted with other children and with adults. He has also seen how the other children who are in his son's class have grown. He explained that he doesn't have a vested interest in having another child of his going into kindergarten. He believed in saying unbiasedly that they have taken a half step with their Pilot Program and they are at the "goal line" so he told them to make a full commitment. He mentioned that this is the time to "pay this forward" to their children. He told the Town Council that he realizes they are all faced with some tough financial decisions. There are a lot of needs that have to be addressed in Rocky Hill. He told the Town Council that he values their time because they are all volunteers. He said the Town Council takes time away from their jobs and from their families in order to make some tough decisions. He also told the Town Council that this is a decision that they need to invest in for the future of the children and

for their future. He understands the financial cost that some people are raising with regards to this but he said that is worth it and it is time to “pay this forward”. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Shawn Piscitelli, 386 Trinity Ridge, R.H., said that he wanted to make a few comments about the state of their schools. He referred to the parents who had already spoken this evening and he said that he was with all of them. He mentioned how they had “driven the point home very well”. He told the Town Council how he understands that they have a lot of hard decisions to make. He mentioned how things seem to have been pushed off as far as the school system goes. He flagged Moser School closing and also the Rocky Hill High School project, etc. He said here they are today where they are. As a parent, he said that he has to say that this is where they are but he can’t worry about it. He cares about wanting these things done. He said that he would comment on the situation with the school security and how he had been present when there were meetings about that. A decision was finally made that this company (SecureWatch 24) would be hired to come in and file their report. The Town, at that time, said they would back this. He hopes to see these things coming through as well. He said the SROs are probably the most controversial subject on that. He sees the state of what is going on and he isn’t seeing this getting better. He also sees examples of where SROs made a difference. He told the Town Council that he wanted them to know that he supports SROs as well. He also told the Town Council good luck. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else wished to speak from the public. Amber Tucker, 77 Berkshire Road, R.H., said she had a lot of the similar points that parents already had made today. She agrees that it is a little bit late for her to start thinking about where her child is going to go to school for next year. She is excited about all-day kindergarten so she didn’t apply to the CREC school. She and her husband were considering moving to a different Town for all-day kindergarten but they stopped searching once they got the exciting news about all-day kindergarten in Rocky Hill. They are four and a half months away from the start of a new school year and she said that the expenses have probably already started. Her impression is that modular classrooms have already been purchased and she mentioned that certain expenses have occurred already. She asked if these will be all sunken funds if they don’t do all-day kindergarten. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Ganishshan Swarnaakrishnamoorthy, 8 Augusta Circle, R.H., said she is from India and children have all-day school from the age of three years old there. She wasn’t trying to compare anything but she said that she was present this evening to put an appeal in for them to really consider the fact that children really need to be in school, preferably all-day school. Her son, who is nine years old and goes to West Hill School, was the most happiest the first time that she had heard about the all-day kindergarten program being approved. She mentioned that her daughter will be starting kindergarten in September. Her son understood at that age how much fun it was to be in school and how they learned a lot. She said that she really couldn’t emphasize more than how school is the foundation and it really makes a lot of difference. She explained some more and said that she was present this evening with her appeal, as well as with the other parents, for the Town Council to consider and not revoke what had been approved previously. She hopes that the parents’ voices are heard. There are some compulsions and she said the parents are limited

with their boundaries. She said for them to work this out together and she knows that they can make a difference in their children's education. She told everyone to just work through this and she thanked them. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. Nick Uccello, 16 Dexter Road, R.H., said he also owns a business in Town. He has lived in Rocky Hill all of his life and he was present this evening to speak in favor of the all-day kindergarten. He mentioned how everybody said, as well as how they all know, that this is very important for the children and for their education. The health of their schools is also important to the health of Rocky Hill. He told the Town Council that they have a financial decision in front of them to make that is pretty daunting. He thinks that everyone is concerned about the cost but a huge detriment can be created to their revenue if they have schools that are considered subpar because Rocky Hill doesn't have things like all-day kindergarten. People will decide that Rocky Hill is not a place where they want to live so this will decrease property values. They aren't going to be able to afford to do the things that they will need to do for the future of this Town, never mind the future of the children, or improve the schools if they reduce their revenue. He said thank you. Mayor Vasel said thank you also.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else wished to speak. A woman from 500 Cold Spring Road, R.H., said she agreed with everything that had been said this evening and she had two additional points. Rocky Hill is a community where a lot of immigrants are coming to stay and this is because of its proximity to Hartford. It will be a very easy decision for these immigrants to move from Rocky Hill to some other place else because they don't own houses, etc. They are looking at the proximity to their workplace and they are looking at the school district. She has a lot of friends who have children who are three years old and who are moving to Rocky Hill knowing that there will be an all-day kindergarten. She is sure that this will help the economy of Rocky Hill but she said that that might change because it will be a very easy change for them to go get an apartment somewhere else if there isn't all-day kindergarten. She then said there is a financial impact to her with regards to having a half-day kindergarten program or an all-day one. She has a five year old daughter and a nine year old son. She is wondering if she should choose a job because the entire salary would go into a daycare seeing that is so expensive. She explained that by having a half day kindergarten that it would mean her paying just as much as it would for a full day daycare. She explained more. She is hoping that this is the last year where she will have to make that difficult choice. It will not be a good thing that is happening if there isn't all-day kindergarten. Her son used to go to Kindercare half a day and she explained that there was hardly any difference between the cost of what she had to pay for a full day daycare compared to a half day one. She mentioned that she hadn't heard these two points mentioned this evening yet so she thought that she would emphasize them. She thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak. Killian Murphy, 6 Christopher Court, R.H., said on behalf of his wife and their fifteen month old son that he would like to address the issue of all-day kindergarten. He said they moved to Rocky Hill because of the numerous services it has, as well as the reputation of the school system. From the east coast to the west coast, finances are tough across the board. A lot of tough decisions need to be made. He said the right thing to do is to fund all-day kindergarten. He referred to this time in their

Country's history where Washington is having so much difficulty in doing the right thing and he thinks it is up to the local governments to lead the way. He thinks the local governments have to show Washington how appropriate decisions and priorities should be made. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. A woman from 167 New Britain Avenue, R.H., said she was present this evening because she has three children who are at West Hill School. Her son will be going to kindergarten next year and she really needs for him to go to all-day kindergarten. She had noticed when she had gone to a meeting with a second grade teacher that she had said if children are not ready or prepared for kindergarten then they won't be ready for first grade. There isn't enough education in two hours and they need to have all-day kindergarten. She thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak. Bryan Addy, 18 Mountain View Drive, R.H., said he has two things that are of highest concern for him. One of these things is the fixing of his street but the most important thing for him is for them to have all-day kindergarten. He has a three year old child and a child who will be five years old this fall, who has been registered for all-day kindergarten. He and his wife are excited financially to have this opportunity after they have had to pay for daycare for four and a half years. There were one hundred and three school districts in Connecticut that had all-day kindergarten last year. This included four of Rocky Hill's neighbors. He knows that Rocky Hill has boasted in the past about having the lowest tax rate of all of their neighbors but he said this falls "on deaf ears" to him if they aren't "keeping up with the Joneses" as far as their educational system is concerned. He told the Town Council to keep the achievement gap closed between Rocky Hill and its neighbors. He would greatly appreciate if they don't cut all-day kindergarten. He told the Town Council that they won't have all-day kindergarten if they don't do this now. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if anyone else from the public wished to speak. A gentleman from 500 Cold Spring Road, R.H., said he is supporting all-day kindergarten and everything that had to be spoken about this had already been by the parents this evening. He came this evening to support the addition of all-day kindergarten. He told the Town Council to please take into consideration the parents' hopes that their children will get all-day kindergarten. He thanked the Town Council. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was anyone else from the public who wished to speak. There was no one else. He said on behalf of the Town Council that everyone in the Council Chambers knows about how the landscape of education has changed over the years. He had a ten year old who programmed his cell phone because he couldn't figure it out. Mayor Vasel said it had been half day kindergarten when he had been in it. Everyone understands that the curriculum they have to do now is a lot more difficult than it ever was. He referred to some comments made by some people about him supporting all-day kindergarten and he said that he has supported it, he will continue to and his support hasn't wavered one bit. They owe it to their children to provide them with an education because they don't deserve any less but he said that they are still negotiating with the vendor for the modular classrooms. He thinks he would be doing a disservice to this

Town in showing his hand as to where they are in the process. All he could say at this point was that they still are in a negotiating stage and he told them he wished he could tell them more. Someone from the audience asked a question at this time but they didn't speak into a microphone. Mayor Vasel's answer was yes to that. He said they are working on it. He had spoken three times to Town Manager Gilbert today and he probably speaks to her three times per day. Mayor Vasel said he speaks to Deputy Mayor Bell and Finance Director Mehr a dozen times per day probably. Mayor Vasel said they are working on this and they are going to make some progress as soon as they get some numbers that will benefit everybody in Rocky Hill, including everyone who was in Council Chambers this evening. He wished that he could say more but he told everyone that he really shouldn't for right now. He told them again to be sure to know that his support hasn't wavered and he said thank you.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion and Possible Action – Modular Classrooms at West Hill and Stevens Schools

Ken Biega (O & G Industries, Inc.) said he had a couple of things to report. He had Friar Associates go back to see if they could work the new layout for three modular classrooms at West Hill School and for one modular classroom at Stevens School. Friar Associates can make the layout work at West Hill School and they will probably have to go back to the Planning and Zoning Commission to show the configuration on that. He had spoken to the Board of Education about possibly putting all of the modular classrooms at West Hill School but that isn't going to work out because of the bussing and the students, etc. They are stuck with one modular classroom at Stevens School and three modular classrooms at West Hill School. He told everyone that he wished he had better news but this is where they are at with that. He mentioned that the good news though is that they can make the new layout work. The square footage of the classrooms will be a little smaller. Originally there was a little over 800 square feet in the documents and now they are approximately at 784 square feet. He said that the Board of Education and Superintendent Dr. Zito feel comfortable that they can make this work.

Mayor Vasel asked the Councilors if any of them had questions for Ken Biega. Councilor Drapeau asked how many students can fit comfortably in the four modular classrooms or he asked what the plan is. Ken Biega said he was going to put this in perspective. He mentioned that O & G Industries, Inc. had done East Lyme High School and their modular classrooms were 750 square feet. Those modular classrooms hold twenty-five high school students. He said the modular classrooms for Rocky Hill will easily hold twenty-five students in that square footage. Councilor Drapeau asked if this will be for each location. Ken Biega said yes because all of the modular classrooms will be the same size for the square footage. Councilor Drapeau confirmed that they could feasibly fit one hundred additional children. Ken Biega said yes.

Councilor Drapeau asked if he could ask Superintendent Dr. Zito a question and he was told yes. Councilor Drapeau said the concern that keeps coming up and that everyone seems to be addressing is that a couple of individuals from Rocky Hill have spoken publically about redistricting. Councilor Drapeau said his main concern about redistricting is them "cramming" all of the children into the schools they have currently and what the classroom sizes will look

like minus the modular classroom answer. He asked Superintendent Dr. Zito how many children they would be increasing per classroom with a redistricting scenario if they went without modular classrooms. Superintendent Dr. Zito said there would be no way to do all-day kindergarten without the modular classrooms unless they redistricted. Councilor Drapeau told the Town Council that that was their answer. Superintendent Dr. Zito said he would be very blunt and candid. There were a number of options that had been investigated and the only option at this “point in the game” are the modular classrooms for next fall. He explained that it is too “late in the game” to consider any other options because of the sprinklers going in at West Hill School and because of the bussing for redistricting. There had been a model of K-2 and 3-5 that had been presented one and a half years ago. They will need the modular classrooms at this point if they want all-day kindergarten in the fall and he said there is no other way around this. Councilor Drapeau thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there were any other questions for Ken Biega. Councilor Moriarty asked about them moving the modular classroom that they own at Rocky Hill High School and if it would be possible for them to have all-day kindergarten then. Superintendent Dr. Zito said not at all because they already have ninety-three students registered for kindergarten at West Hill School so three modular classrooms are needed there in order to make that work. He explained that he is a little concerned about that number because it is high right now. He has sixty-three students registered for kindergarten at Stevens School. There is usually a significant surge of enrollment at Stevens School in July and August so he explained that just one modular classroom wouldn’t make this happen. He told the Town Council that most of them have been on tours in the schools and it is very tight in them. They are going to need the full arrangement of the modular classrooms in order to make all-day kindergarten work for the fall at this point. Councilor Moriarty said he had heard on the news about a decision today as to how the birthdate with regards to entering into kindergarten is being changed and how they won’t be going all the way to December for kindergarten. Superintendent Dr. Zito said this will have no impact for next year and he said that he will have to look into this some more. Right now, the rule is that if a child turns five years old prior to January 1st in a given school year then that child is eligible for kindergarten. There will be a four year old who occasionally enters kindergarten as long as they turn five years old by January 1st. He told them that they will access this for subsequent years if the date is moved back. Councilor Moriarty thinks the date is being moved back to September 1st. Town Manager Gilbert said this is going to be phased in.

Councilor Casasanta thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito, members of the Board of Education and also Ken Biega for coming this evening. Councilor Casasanta said for the members of the public who hadn’t been present last night that she was going to “piggyback” on some questions that she had asked then. She had asked about the rollout last night and what this is going to look like. There is a concern as to whether they are going to be starting on time or not. She asked Ken Biega if he could please explain how this will work from his standpoint. Ken Biega told the Councilors that they had a schedule in their packets and he told Councilor Casasanta that he didn’t know if she had gotten a copy of that. Councilor Casasanta said that she did. Ken Biega said the critical issue is the Town making a decision. ModSpace, the contractor for the modular classrooms, was looking for an award letter this week and he said they were actually looking at something for today from the Town that will direct them to start proceeding. ModSpace will need to do shop drawings and get them to the Building Department so that they can get a

building permit, etc. so that there will be no issues with that. They need to start the foundations for the modular classrooms when the children get out of school for the school year. He asked if he is seeing this as an issue right now and he said no unless they encounter some big issue or surprise at West Hill School underground when they are digging the foundation that would change something. He mentioned that there should not be an issue over there though. Councilor Casasanta said it seems like they have been getting hit with big surprises and they have gone from one budgetary amount to two to three times that amount. She wants people to understand that this is the fiscal situation they are in.

Councilor Casasanta told Superintendent Dr. Zito that he had mentioned some concern about late registration for kindergarteners for Stevens School and she asked him what his concern is like on a scale from one to ten. Superintendent Dr. Zito asked Councilor Casasanta if this was with regards to Stevens School. Councilor Casasanta said yes or with regards to late registration at any of the schools. Superintendent Dr. Zito said if they get the three modular classrooms for West Hill School and if they get one modular classroom for Stevens School then this will absolutely work. They won't have all-day kindergarten if they don't get these. Councilor Casasanta confirmed with Superintendent Dr. Zito that he is basing his concern on whether or not they have the modular classrooms. Superintendent Dr. Zito said that is the major concern he has. He referred to Stevens School again with regards to how many students they have registered for kindergarten and how that number will go up. Councilor Casasanta thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito.

Councilor Moriarty asked Town Manager Gilbert how they are going to make this work because the funds aren't available until July 1, 2014. Town Manager Gilbert said the funds aren't available but it is being recommended to give ModSpace a deposit of \$75,000 upfront and she explained that this is what they were recommending if these modular classrooms were to be constructed. They have been able to locate modular classrooms that are constructed so the timeline is short somewhat. An order will be placed for the modular classrooms and these will be contingent upon the approval of the funds and the adoption of the budget. ModSpace will be given a deposit that will be refundable and they can prepare the modifications to the modular classrooms but if this isn't approved by the Town Council then a purchase order will be issued on July 1, 2014. She mentioned how she and Finance Director Mehr had been discussing this today. Town Manager Gilbert said if they go with the modular classrooms that are onsite in Middletown at ModSpace then they will be one month ahead of the timeframe they had when they had done the last round of modular classrooms. They should be able to have everything in place by the end of the second week in August 2014. That will allow two weeks for the teachers to set their things up. She told them if this is the route that the Town Council chooses to go then they will have to start as soon as possible. She wants to make sure that they are guaranteed that the refurbishment that has to be done to the modular classrooms will begin as soon as possible. The Stevens School site will offer some difficulty because of its configuration and how small it is. A minor zoning modification also has to be sought and they have to get this going as soon as possible. Councilor Moriarty referred to how there is all ledge at West Hill School and he asked if they are concerned about rock when the addition will be put up there. Ken Biega said they are concerned about this so they are keeping this closer to the waterline where they don't have as many problems with this rock.

Councilor MacDonald asked Town Manager Gilbert what the mechanics would be of this exactly now from the Town Council. Councilor MacDonald said they obviously have a lot of people who are talking about all-day kindergarten. He is supporting that and he said that many, if not all of the Councilors, will be supporting it. He hates to keep waiting on this. He asked Town Manager Gilbert if there is a motion that she would like the Town Council to make or that she is recommending so that they can start moving forward on this. Councilor MacDonald said this would be with them knowing the amounts that they have worked out. There are a couple of different options for the modular classrooms (buying them or leasing them). This is just a matter of finances and it isn't a matter of whether they want modular classrooms or not because the question for that had been asked, as well as answered. He asked what they are going to do today to move Ken Biega along so that they get the modular classrooms in time for the school year. Town Manager Gilbert said one thing they have to do is make adjustments to the Capital Improvement Program so that they will have sufficient funds in place to cover the pure lease component if that is the way that the Town Council wishes to go. The second thing is that a Resolution would have to be prepared and she said that they could have this on the Town Council agenda for their meeting on Monday evening. If this is the way the Town Council wishes to go then this will authorize the Town to use \$75,000 from one of the funds they have this year as a deposit on the modular classrooms so they can begin the process. If not, they will just have a purchase order issued once the budget is adopted in order for this to be in effect for July 1, 2014.

Mayor Vasel asked the Councilors if they had any other questions. Councilor Drapeau asked if there was a chance that they could lose the modular classrooms that were on hold right now. Ken Biega said he would be very surprised if that happened between now and Monday if the Town Council is going to take action then because ModSpace had said that they didn't have any other "home" for these.

Town Manager Gilbert told Mayor Vasel that there was one other component for this and she said that she needs authorization to sign the contract. Councilor MacDonald asked Town Manager Gilbert if she would have all of this prepared for Monday so that they could expedite this and so that they could take a vote to move on with this. Town Manager Gilbert said they would. Finance Director Mehr said they also have to allocate funds to cover the shortfall if they go the leasing route. That would probably be the quickest and the least expensive. Town Manager Gilbert said in the interim that she will find out if this will have to go before the Planning and Zoning Commission or if the Town Planner can sign off on this as a minor zoning modification.

Mayor Vasel asked the Councilors if they had any other questions. Deputy Mayor Bell started to ask Town Manager Gilbert "if there were any obstacles or if there was anything that needed attention within the next three" when Town Manager Gilbert started speaking and said that Mayor Vasel would get a call faster than she could say his name. Deputy Mayor Bell said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if any other Councilors had questions and they didn't. He thanked Ken Biega. Mayor Vasel asked the Councilors if they had a motion to table this item seeing that they

probably were going to have all of the paperwork ready for this on Monday that they would need in order to vote on this.

Councilor Szeps moved to table New Business Item A – Discussion and Possible Action – Modular Classrooms at West Hill and Stevens Schools. The motion was seconded by Councilor MacDonald and adopted unanimously.

VI. BUDGET WORKSHOP

A. Board of Education

Superintendent Dr. Zito thanked Mayor Vasel. Superintendent Dr. Zito said he would give a PowerPoint presentation and then he would open this up to questions. He introduced Frank Connolly (Finance Manager), Lynn Boisvert (Finance Department), Marian Hourigan (Assistant Superintendent), and some Board of Education members (Frank Morse (Chairman), Rene (Skip) Rivard, Jim Moriarty, Jennifer Allison and John Bedlack). Superintendent Dr. Zito said they appreciated the Board of Education being present this evening.

Superintendent Dr. Zito gave his PowerPoint presentation at this point. The overall budget figure for the Board of Education is \$33,459,389 and this is a 5.68% increase at \$1,800,000. After the presentation was over, he told the Town Council that he knows they will have a difficult job as they make their budget deliberations and he told them that they would be happy to answer any questions that they might have. Mayor Vasel thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito.

Councilor Drapeau referred to the slide in the PowerPoint presentation with regards to the economic development spreadsheet and he asked if a copy of that is on the Economic Development Director's desk in full color and glossy so that he could hand that to everyone who comes through because that was an impressive slide.

Frank Morse went up to the podium at this point and he told the Town Council that he was glad to say that as much as they talk to Town Manager Gilbert and Finance Director Mehr that he talks just about the same amount to Superintendent Dr. Zito and Finance Director Connolly. Frank Morse said the Board of Education has been "hammering" at their budget trying to find out what they can do to help the Town. He was glad to say that their end of the year budget looks like they should have a savings of approximately \$300,000. He told the Town Council that they would gladly give this back to the Town or they could pre-spend this on things like technology, which is \$162,000. He mentioned that their budget number could go down by \$300,000 next year at this time. The Board of Education as a whole would have to discuss this at their meeting next week he said obviously but they felt pretty comfortable at this time that they would be able to give back \$300,000. Mayor Vasel said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if there were any Councilors who had any questions. Councilor Kochanek asked Superintendent Dr. Zito how many of their students attend VoAg schools and how many attend magnet schools. Superintendent Dr. Zito referred to a data sheet. He said they were billed this year for one hundred and eighteen students attending CREC schools. There are one hundred and eighteen students attending Hartford schools but Rocky Hill isn't billed for those. Hartford

has opened up their schools to suburban students but they don't bill. The normal cost for the students that Rocky Hill is billed for ranges from \$3,300 to close to \$5,000. This depends on the CREC magnet school. Councilor Kochanek asked where the VoAg would be (i.e. Prince Tech). Superintendent Dr. Zito told Councilor Kochanek that they could get him the VoAg numbers but this would be just three or four students who go to those schools. Councilor Kochanek confirmed that that was it. Superintendent Dr. Zito said Prince Tech, etc. would be a different system and those are State technical schools. He said they would provide all of that data to the Town Council tomorrow. Deputy Mayor Bell asked if Vinyl Tech would be part of the State technical schools. Superintendent Dr. Zito said that is right and he also mentioned Cheney Tech. Councilor Moriarty said there are seventeen State technical schools. Superintendent Dr. Zito said they only have transportation costs associated with those students and there are no tuition bills. The tuition bills are from the CREC schools.

Town Manager Gilbert said she wanted to add something for Councilor Kochanek. Town Manager Gilbert said that some of the students who choose to go to the CREC high schools go there for half of the school day and then they go to Rocky Hill High School for the other half. Those students receive their diplomas from Rocky Hill High School. Councilor Kochanek said thank you.

Councilor Casasanta reiterated what Councilor Drapeau had said about Superintendent Dr. Zito's presentation and she told Superintendent Dr. Zito that his presentation was quite impressive. Councilor Casasanta said that she wished they could download that on their computers so that they could play it again. Superintendent Dr. Zito said that he could send that to Town Manager Gilbert. Councilor Casasanta said that would be great. She referred to the increasing costs for textbooks and she asked Superintendent Dr. Zito if there were any avenues that he might be taking in the future for digital textbooks. Superintendent Dr. Zito said they have looked at some of that and Assistant Superintendent Hourigan has done some work on that. Superintendent Dr. Zito asked Assistant Superintendent Hourigan if she wanted to speak on that. Assistant Superintendent Hourigan did speak about it but she didn't speak into a microphone. Superintendent Dr. Zito thinks they will see a continual shift towards textbooks online over the next few years. He explained that this will also cause them to go back to the Board of Education to have conversations with them about electronic devices in the school and them investigating policies for students bringing their own electronic devices to school. There are some pitfalls he said but there are also some serious advantages too if they think about children bringing their iPads into school. He said they aren't quite at that point yet but the Board of Education Policy Committee has been having some conversations as to what this might look like in the future. He thinks at some point soon that they will be seeing laptops or iPads with seven textbooks loaded on them compared to when they had been in school he said and they had seven textbooks in their backpacks. Councilor Casasanta said she is taking classes online now and she knows about the convenience of this, as well as that it is very secure. She said that this will hopefully be a trend down the line moving forward so that the line item for the textbooks can be reduced and that would be a great thing. Superintendent Dr. Zito said he wasn't 100% sure that this would eliminate costs totally because the publishing companies are still going to want to make money. There will be costs but he thinks they are moving in that direction. Councilor Casasanta said thank you very much.

Mayor Vassel asked if there were any other Councilors with questions. Councilor Drapeau said he has read a few articles here and there about certain Towns around the State, as well as around the Country, that are wavering on the common core initiative. He asked Superintendent Dr. Zito what his position is on this. Superintendent Dr. Zito said this is good for the children. This entails strong instruction. He said there is a significant shift and he gave an example in the area of literacy with regards to getting children to get more focused on non-fiction reading with regards to how to understand it, etc. He told the Town Council that if they think about it that on a daily basis, most of them are engaged in heavy non-fiction work in their jobs. He said they are also pushing children to do more in mathematics at an earlier age. He mentioned how the United States isn't performing as well as some of the other Countries in areas like science and mathematics. He said that their overall view is that this (common core initiative) is a good thing and he said that his opinion, as well as Assistant Superintendent Hourigan's, is that they don't see this as a negative. They are moving forward with this and they think this is going to be fine for children. Their Staff is adjusting well to this. They had a really good year and the children are continuing to perform well. They don't see this as being a major burden for them overall.

Mayor Vassel asked if any other Councilors had any questions. Councilor MacDonald told Superintendent Dr. Zito that he thought his presentation was great and he thought the Board of Education's budget came in very much in line with what the taxpayers expect in Rocky Hill for a high quality education. Councilor MacDonald thinks the funding for the all-day kindergarten that is built into the operating budget is adequate. He explained if the costs for all-day kindergarten are pared out that the budget is around a 4% increase probably. This is compared to an operating cost of 6.8% for the Town. He said that is significantly less on a percentage base for an increase. He said that he would argue that a good portion of that probably is because of the Board of Education's positive healthcare costs and that is probably where they are getting some of the surplus money from. He explained that this is why he tried to push to have the healthcare plans combined for the Town and the Board of Education three years ago. He told the Town Council to imagine if they took the Board of Education's very positive healthcare experience and if they combined it with the Town's not so positive healthcare experience on the Town side how the overall savings would have been very tremendous to the taxpayers. He understands that nothing has been done in three years and he understands going forward that when the new Finance Director for the Board of Education is hired that one of the top priorities will be that person working with the Town with regards to trying to merge the two plans. He said that he had been told this at a recent budget session they had and he asked if that was accurate. Superintendent Dr. Zito said this is a topic that he definitely would bring back to the Board of Education and he said that his opinion is that they have had a very good claims' experience. He said from having worked in different communities that a positive benefit is generally seen when plans can be combined. The reason that this is typically seen is because the risk pool is expanded. He said that they also typically tend to see better claims' experience on Board of Education sides than on Town sides and that is a function of age. He explained more. He told Councilor MacDonald that he thinks his comment is a good one from a global perspective but this is something that the Board of Education would have to personally direct him to do. Councilor MacDonald told Superintendent Dr. Zito when he looked at his budget numbers that the Town Council really can't touch the salaries and benefits, as well as the transportation and tuition. Councilor MacDonald said this would be unless they were going to lay off teachers, which had been a proposal years ago, but he doesn't think that is the appetite for

this current Town Council. He mentioned that that is 94% of the total Board of Education budget so there is not a whole lot left in there and he told Superintendent Dr. Zito that he thought he did a really great job in using the rest of the 6%. Councilor MacDonald mentioned how the test scores are improving and that there are more offerings at Rocky Hill High School than they have ever had before, etc. He said this is a compliment to the entire Board of Education in putting a budget together. Their budgets in the past would have arbitrarily been cut. He thinks this budget clearly aligns to the values of Rocky Hill. Superintendent Dr. Zito said thank you.

Councilor Drapeau told Superintendent Dr. Zito that he also was very impressed with his presentation. Councilor Drapeau said he was a little spirited about the one slide but he said that he was so impressed with the grades that their children are getting. He was surprised with that. He thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito and the educators of Rocky Hill for doing such a great job. Councilor Drapeau said that he and his wife have a child in second grade and they elected to send him out of Town for all-day kindergarten. He referred to how one of the individuals from the public had come up to speak this evening and how he had indicated about how he had seen a great amount of growth in his child from being in an all-day scenario in kindergarten. Councilor Drapeau said he also had seen the same thing in his son. He referred to one other thing that he had noticed in all-day kindergarten. This had to do with class sizes. He firmly believes that the larger the class size is, the lower the educational product. He referred to Rocky Hill's scenario and he said the taxpayers of the Town just can't afford to build a school. He thinks the modular classrooms are an optimal and acceptable solution to this problem. He said that he fully supports that and he would be voting for that. He commended Superintendent Dr. Zito for doing the best that he could in a difficult scenario. Superintendent Dr. Zito said thank you.

Mayor Vasel asked if any other Councilors had any questions for Superintendent Dr. Zito. The Councilors had none. Mayor Vasel thanked Superintendent Dr. Zito and the Board of Education for running this efficiently enough for them to have a surplus. Mayor Vasel thought the test scores speak for themselves.

Mayor Vasel asked if there was a motion.

Deputy Mayor Bell made a motion to move page 110 (Board of Education) of the budget book. The motion was seconded by Councilor Vargas and adopted unanimously.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Deputy Mayor Bell moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilor Szeps and adopted unanimously.

As there was no further discussion, the budget workshop was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica M. Dumas
Clerk of the Council